



# Natural Heritage & Endangered Species Program

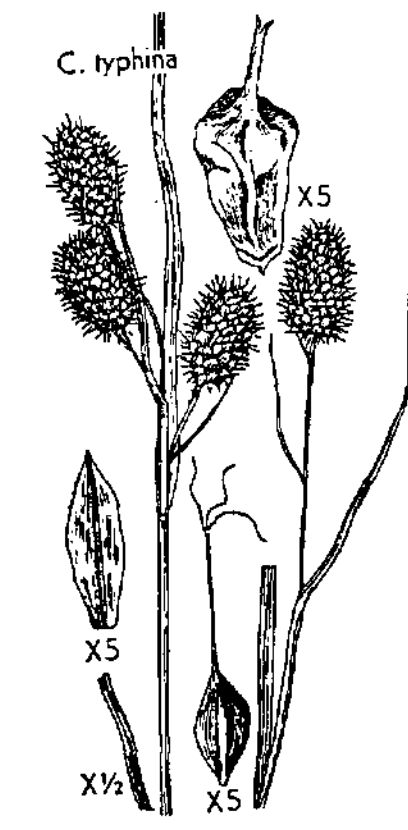
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## MASSACHUSETTS THREATENED PLANTS

### CAT-TAIL SEDGE (*Carex typhina* Michx.)

#### Description

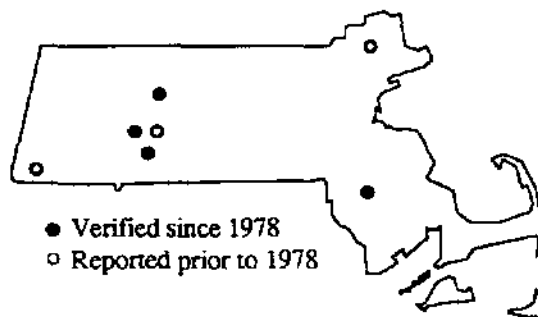
Cat-tail sedge is a grass-like perennial in the Sedge family (Cyperaceae) that grows from 3 to 8 dm (1 to 2 3/4 ft.) in height, in dense clumps. Its leaves are 5-10 mm (0.2 - 0.4 in.) wide, with upper leaves generally overtopping the stem. Like most members of the Sedge family, cat-tail sedge has no showy flower parts. The much-reduced flowers are arranged in 1-6 cylindrical spikes. The upper-most spikes are 2-4 cm (0.75 - 1.5 in.) in length, consist mostly of pistillate (female) flowers and are subtended by a narrow bract (modified leaf located near a flower or inflorescence). The lateral spikes are somewhat smaller and entirely pistillate. Cat-tail sedge's thin-walled perigynia (sac-like structures that surround the pistils and fruits) are 3.5-5 mm (0.14 - 0.2 in.) long and obconic-obovoid in shape (roughly like an egg with its narrow end down). Each perigynium is topped with a two-toothed "beak" or elongation of the pistil. Obtuse to acute pistillate scales subtend each perigynium, but are generally



Gleason, H.A. The New Britton and Brown Illustrated Flora of the US & Adjacent Canada. NY Botanical Garden, 1952.



Documented Range of  
Cat-tail Sedge



Massachusetts Distribution by Town

hidden by the dense perigynia. The slender, uppermost portion of the pistil is straight or nearly straight. Cat-tail sedge's perigynia mature from early July through early September.

#### Range

The range of cat-tail sedge extends from southern Quebec to southern Wisconsin, south to Georgia, Louisiana and Texas. It is disjunct in Minnesota.

#### Similar Species

Squarrose sedge (*Carex squarrosa*) could easily be mistaken for cat-tail sedge. Nevertheless, the strongly curved style (slender, uppermost portion of the pistil) of squarrose sedge distinguishes the two species. In addition, squarrose sedge usually has just one spike and only rarely has as many as three.

#### Habitat in Massachusetts

Habitats of cat-tail sedge are floodplain forests and their immediate vicinity--all of which experience annual, spring flooding. Among the species associated with cat-tail sedge in Massachusetts are silver maple (*Acer saccharinum*), swamp white oak (*Quercus bicolor*), red maple (*Acer rubrum*), American elm (*Ulmus americana*), sensitive fern (*Onoclea sensibilis*), false nettle (*Boehmeria cylindrica*), and bladder sedge (*Carex intumescens*). Rare Massachusetts plants that have been found with cat-tail sedge include winged monkey-flower (*Mimulus alatus*) and Gray's sedge (*Carex grayi*).

#### Population Status

Cat-tail sedge is presently listed as "Threatened" in the Commonwealth, where there are six current stations (discovered or relocated since 1978) in four towns and three historical stations (unverified since 1978). Reasons for the plant's rarity in Massachusetts are that cat-tail sedge is near the northeastern limit of its range here and that a great deal of its habitat has been cleared for agriculture. Cat-tail sedge is also considered rare in Delaware, Maryland, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Vermont, and West Virginia. It was present historically in Maine and Michigan.